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Letter dated 5 April 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

As you know, Security Council members agreed on 3 April 2007 to the proposal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to hold an open debate in the Council on 17 April, and that this letter would serve as the agenda item for the debate, from which there will be no formal outcome.

I have the honour to enclose on behalf of my delegation a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concept paper for this debate (see annex), which has benefited from comments by Council colleagues.

I would be grateful if this letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Emyr Jones Parry

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Annex to the letter dated 5 April 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Energy, Security and Climate

Security Council open debate: United Kingdom concept paper

On 17 April 2007 the Security Council will hold an open debate exploring the relationship between energy, security and climate.

Background and objective

1. All members of the international community face a shared dilemma. To ensure well-being for a growing population with unfulfilled needs and rising expectations, we must grow our economies. Should we fail, we increase the risk of conflict and insecurity. To grow our economies we must continue to use more energy. Much of that energy will be in the form of fossil fuels. But if we use more fossil fuels without mitigating the resulting emissions, we will accelerate climate change, which itself presents risks to the very security we are trying to build.

2. The aim of the debate is to raise awareness of a set of significant future security risks facing the international community as a result of failing to resolve this shared dilemma, to promote a shared understanding of these risks, and to explore ways to address them.

3. The focus of the debate will be on the security implications of a changing climate, including through its impact on potential drivers of conflict (such as access to energy, water, food and other scarce resources, population movements and border disputes). No other international forum has yet addressed these issues from this perspective. A Security Council discussion will therefore make a useful initial contribution, while recognizing that it is for other United Nations bodies (in particular the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) to pursue other aspects of climate change that are not within the mandate of the Security Council (including action to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a safe level, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities).

4. World leaders agreed in the United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome document (General Assembly resolution 60/1) on the need to act with resolve and urgency in facing the serious and multiple challenges in tackling climate change, promoting clean energy, meeting energy needs and achieving sustainable development. At the same time, the Security Council, meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government (resolution 1625 (2005)) reaffirmed the need to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention, which addresses the root causes of armed conflict and political and social crises in a comprehensive manner, including inter alia by promoting sustainable development.

5. The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is further documenting the likely impact of climate change, with the

forthcoming Working Group II report (to be released on 6 April) providing more detail on the likely physical and human impacts, including key vulnerabilities.

6. **While the physical effects of climate change and what can be done about them are important issues, it is their potential impact on security that is the proposed focus of this Security Council debate.**

Impact on key security risks

7. Research on the wider implications of climate change is exploring its potential impact on issues closely associated with threats to international peace and security, as described below:

(a) Border disputes

A significant proportion of current threats to international peace and security are disputes over borders or land. Melting ice and rising sea levels caused by climate change are likely to result in major changes to the world's physical landmass during this century. Will political and maritime borders change as well? Areas of concern include the possible submergence of entire small island States, dramatically receding coastlines, and the development of new shipping routes. These could all lead to disputes over maritime zones and other territorial rights. Such disputes may require resolution through international politics as well as international law.

(b) Migration

On current projections, substantial parts of the world risk being left uninhabitable by rising sea levels, reduced freshwater availability or declining agricultural capacity. This will exacerbate existing migratory pressures from rural areas to cities, from unproductive land to more fertile land, and across international borders. Some estimates suggest up to 200 million people may be displaced by the middle of the century. Migration does not in itself lead directly to conflict. But it can alter the ethnic composition and/or population distribution within and between States, which can increase the potential for instability and conflict — particularly in situations of resource scarcity, and in already sensitive cross-border areas.

(c) Energy supplies

There is already extensive discussion on the relationship between energy resources and the risk of conflict, in terms of competition over scarce energy resources, security of supply, and the role energy resources play once conflict has broken out. Climate change is expected to complicate this relationship still further, presenting us with a shared dilemma about how to balance our climate and energy objectives while preserving security. Some nations will seek to change their sources of energy supply to reduce emissions, or for other reasons. Others will have to change their sources of energy supply as a result of the physical impacts of climate change, for example changing patterns in the availability of hydroelectric power due to glacier melt and changing river flows. Gradual, managed changes are unlikely to lead to conflict. More sudden changes might.

(d) Other resource shortages

Climate change is likely to make essential resources (notably freshwater, cultivable land, crop yields and fish stocks) more scarce in many parts of the world, particularly in already vulnerable societies. Resource scarcity threatens people's livelihoods, especially when changes occur relatively quickly. Much depends on the adequacy of adaptation strategies. But increased scarcity increases the risk of competition over resources within and between communities and States. This can create instability, increasing vulnerability to conflict. This is already well documented in the case of freshwater, whose availability may decrease by at least 20-30 per cent in some regions as a result of climate change, while populations continue to increase.

(e) Societal stress

Some States consider climate change the most serious threat to their development in general, and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in particular. The 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change noted that climate change was a major challenge to poverty reduction, affecting the poorest countries earliest and most. The tensions that climate change through its impact on development — and hence inequality — could produce within and between States might not in themselves necessarily lead to conflict. But in some weaker States — e.g., where severe inequalities occur among different groups in society, for example on ethnic grounds — political violence within and between States may become more likely.

(f) Humanitarian crises

Climate change is likely to increase the risk of extreme weather events that may become sudden humanitarian emergencies. There are already indications that such events, especially on a large scale, can exacerbate societal and cross-border stresses, with potential consequent political and security impacts. There is a proven correlation between drought and the likelihood of high intensity conflicts in some regions, and some Governments have struggled to cope with the social consequences of major natural disasters.

8. Conflicts often start when societies cannot cope with multiple stresses. In assessing the risks posed by climate change in each of these areas, we need to consider how the different impacts will interact with each — for example, how resource shortages and migration will impact development and inequality and States' vulnerability to, or ability to deal effectively with, humanitarian crises. We also need to recognize that the past may not always be a good guide to the future as we encounter climatic changes that are more extreme, widespread and continual than any experienced by modern human societies to date.

9. The immediate drivers of conflict are likely to remain national and regional power struggles; ideology; ethnic, religious and national tensions; and severe economic, social or political inequality. **The cumulative impacts of climate change could exacerbate these drivers of conflict, and particularly increase the risk to those States already susceptible to conflict**, for example where weak governance and political processes cannot mediate successfully between competing interests.

10. In this regard, it is worth noting that parts of the developing world are both particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and least equipped to cope with them. Some States in these regions, notably in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, parts of the Middle East, and parts of Asia and the Pacific, are already areas of existing instability, and in some cases, current or recent conflict.

Questions for discussion

11. **We suggest that discussion in the Security Council debate could usefully focus on the following questions**:

(a) Which of the risks (or combination of risks) that climate change presents to international peace and security are of most significance, particularly in the most unstable parts of the world? Are there other risks not identified here?

(b) What are the priority areas where our understanding needs to be improved? And how can we build a sufficient, shared understanding?

(c) How can the Security Council play a part in a more integrated approach to conflict prevention as foreseen in Security Council resolution 1625 (2005), including greater emphasis on climate-related factors?

(d) How can the international community prepare more effectively to support States or regions at increased risk of instability because of climate-related factors?

(e) What role is there for the Secretariat to better inform the Security Council and the wider United Nations membership of the risks that climate change presents to security, and to promote a more coherent response to reducing that risk across the United Nations family?